

Who is Qualified to Teach Music? A Response to Music Education and Avocational Music Making

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Music Education and Avocational Music Making Symposium

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This symposium led by Roger Mantie posed three questions:

- *What might we see when we think of music making as leisure?*
- *What are possible implications for music making, reframed as leisure, in music education contexts?*
- *How do discourses of avocational music making interact with constructs of professional and career musicianship in music education?*

In order to respond to these three questions, I raised another question:

Who is qualified to teach music?

It's a bit of strange question for a symposium on avocational music making, but for me it is a central question, and I will explain why.

But first, I just want to address some problematic issues with the notion of avocational music making and leisure time.

I don't know very much about theoretical concepts of leisure, as it's not my field, but from my own perspective as a working class girl from a rural, former coal mining community in the middle of England, leisure has always felt like the preserve of the privileged. Leisure time is created by time saving gadgets, which cost money, by hiring help with child care, housework, gardening (although that could also be construed as a leisure activity, for me it's not, it's a chore). Those who are able to create space for their children for horse-riding, ballet, piano lessons, swimming lessons, etc, do so. Those who can't, don't. For the hundreds of thousands of people in the UK who work, but live in poverty, leisure is a privilege. My own music education came from singing in a church choir, and this was definitely not a leisure activity.

I can't speak for anyone from a different country, but in the few countries where I have travelled, and for the many people that I have met, I'm not sure that leisure time is a concept that sits in all cultures, and to frame music making as leisure is to frame

it in a very Western/Northern hemisphere way. For example, we spent the week in Georgia with the Community Music Activity commission seminar. We saw some fantastic music making and heard how singing is deeply entwined with notions of community, spirituality, ritual, and survival. I'm not sure that viewing it as leisure particularly fits this context. So to term music education as leisure education is very problematic.

Moving on to the notion of music making being avocational. One thing that I am having to come to terms with in my daily work is the concept of employability that is driving higher education in England – the question I ask myself is, am I only there to get the kids I teach employed? One thing that I do have to do is help the students to understand that when they are teaching, because most of them already do, and 99% of them will, the students they teach will not necessarily want to follow their path. Plus, there are many pathways that people will take, all as valid as each other. This is hard for these students as they have always been led to believe that their path is the 'correct', the 'best', the 'only' path, and this notion undermines their own sense of security in the route that they have chosen. But, if we start to think of avocational music what we are in fact doing is polarising two pursuits – vocational and avocational, which might reinforce a perceived hierarchy. Moreover, we are playing into the hands of the neoliberal agenda of employability. Why? Because it separates out economic music making from non-economic music making, but in doing so, it opens a door for marketised non-economic music making (i.e. For profit organisations to lead avocational music activities - it is a new strand of employability with economic value). As we are starting to see in English schools as a result of budget cuts – the door is open for companies to sell their wares to schools. Anyone with an aggressive marketing department and impressive PR materials can push their way in, but without necessarily a strong pedagogical foundation and I would question many of these organisations motives.

When I attended the SIMM conference in Porto in May 2018, I attended a seminar on Global Music Education in Decline. Here the great and the good of the Western world told us how Music Education is in global decline. Firstly, I'm not sure there is a thing as Global Music Education – and why do we want it? Who wants to come Baku and eat a MacDonalds burger? Although I do get that people in Baku might want to eat a MacDonalds burger, it is their choice. And surely globalisation is about celebrating difference not making us all the same. Secondly, again from the English perspective, yes, traditional music programmes and qualifications are in decline, but other fields of music are blossoming – pop music courses, rockschool exams, and music technology are all areas that have been on the rise. So it is Music Education, but not as they know it. But thirdly, and most significantly for me and this symposium, on the one hand there was the view that music is open to all, we need to be inclusive, we need diversity in music, and if music education is in global decline then lots of children will miss out, but on the other hand we were told how disgraceful it is that primary aged children were not even taught by qualified musicians – that they had to be taught by general class teachers.

Whilst working at the Institute of Education in London, prior to RCM, I worked with general class student teachers. I surveyed them at the point of entry to their programme for three consecutive years and they were the most musically diverse group of people that you would ever meet in any context. I found that not only were they doing all kinds of music, from singing in church and religious groups, dj'ing of an

evening, playing in bands, playing and singing on their own and with friends, two thirds of them could play a musical instrument at some level, and around 25% of them had a significant qualification in music. On top of this, there were more student teachers feeling confident about teaching music than not confident, and this was a very complex thing. Things some people felt confident about, others didn't, and vice versa. Some said they were not confident as they didn't know how to teach music yet, others were happy to learn, the ones with the highest level of qualification often felt the least confident. Yes, in-service teachers report not being confident with music, but those coming into their teacher education programme seem to be fairly confident – so what happens when they go into school?

The problem they face is that we forget what primary music is – it is exploration, discovery, creation, risk-taking, deep listening, talking about music, making musical decisions, opening up to a wide range of different ways of making music. It is not achieving grade 3 flute. Or singing in the premier choir. Or being asked to mime or sit out because the conductor thinks that you are not able. But these young adults entering general class teaching are crushed by the excellence agenda. In order to preserve the elite, we create a mystique around music making. Unfortunately we also do this with music teaching, projecting the view that only those who are highly trained musicians can teach music. You do not need a degree in Maths, English, and Science to teach primary Maths, English, and science. You do not even need an A-level (High School Certificate taken at 18yrs old) in Maths, English, and Science to teach primary Maths, English, and science, so why do we believe you need a degree in Music to teach primary Music?

The employability agenda is pushing the professionalization of those who have traditionally led grass roots music making – community musicians and primary class teachers. If children only see highly professional and accomplished people making music and not the other end of the spectrum, they will never be able to see where they fit in the musical world.

Here is the implication for music education – if we do not change our view on who can teach music, we are never going to capture all children's musical imaginations and show them that they can engage in music at all kinds of different levels. Ultimately, the primary/elementary general class teacher is the child's everyday musical role model. Without this, children will never see everyday music making in adulthood that the field of music making and leisure or avocational music making is trying to celebrate.